

Additions and Interpolations in the *Bhagavadgītā*

by P. L. BHARGAVA

The *Bhagavadgītā* is universally acknowledged as a great book, full of noble teachings and edifying thoughts. The orthodox Hindus believe that the words attributed to Kṛṣṇa in this work actually emanated from his mouth. Although Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva and Devakī, appears to have been a historical person who was in all probability identical with Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī, mentioned in the *Cbāndogya Upaniṣad*, no sober historian will be prepared to concede that the *Bhagavadgītā* contains the actual words spoken by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. The view generally held by scholars is that it is the composition of a poet who wanted to epitomize the teachings attributed to Kṛṣṇa. While subscribing to this view, the present writer has, after a patient and critical study of this work, come to the conclusion that a considerable part of the *Bhagavadgītā* in its present form consists of additions and interpolations, since this part is inconsistent with the rest of the work which must have been the original *Bhagavadgītā*. This may sound heresy, but the risk is worth taking if it leads to the discernment of truth.

Almost each one of the great teachers of the world has suffered deification at the hands of his followers, and Kṛṣṇa too could not escape this fate. It is certain that Kṛṣṇa was originally a human teacher who was later deified. The *Cbāndogya Upaniṣad* mentions Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī, as a disciple of the sage Ghora Āṅgīrasa without any claim to divinity. The *Bhagavadgītā* in its present form consists of two clear-cut parts, one of which, barring a few sporadic verses which can be shown to be interpolated, regards Kṛṣṇa as a human teacher, while in the other part Kṛṣṇa claims to be the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God in almost every verse. The difference between the two parts, moreover, is not confined to Kṛṣṇa's utterances but extends to Arjuna's mode of addressing Kṛṣṇa. Thus while in one part Arjuna always addresses Kṛṣṇa by his name or one of his well-known epithets as Acyuta, Keśava, Govinda, Madhusūdana, Janārdana, Mādhava, Vārṣṇeya, Hṛṣīkeśa and Keśinīśūdana, it is only in the other part that he addresses him as Puruṣottama, Bhūtabhāvana, Bhūteśa, Devadeva, Jagatpati, Parameśvara, Viśveśvara, Ananta, Deveśa, and Jagannivasa — all names of the Supreme Being. The part in which Kṛṣṇa claims to be God and is addressed as such by Arjuna consists of chap. VII to XII. In the remaining twelve chapters which must have formed the original *Bhagavadgītā* only a few verses lay claim to the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and these, as we shall presently see, are clearly interpolated.

Since the first chapter of the *Gītā* describes merely the despondency of Arjuna, there is neither the necessity nor the room for interpolation. In the second chapter the only verse in which Kṛṣṇa appears in the role of God is v. 61 and it is clearly interpolated. Thus v. 60 describes the effect of unrestrained senses on the mind of a man and the same idea is continued in vv. 62 and 63, but v. 61 describes the result of restraining senses with Kṛṣṇa as the supreme goal, which seems to be a paraphrase of v. 68 which describes the same thing at the proper place, but without any reference to Kṛṣṇa's divinity. Verse 61 is, therefore, not only out of place, but also redundant.

The third chapter which treats of the yoga of action has two interpolations. The first interpolation consists of vv. 22-24. A semblance of unity is produced by the fact that these verses in which Kṛṣṇa is said to be engaged in action for the good of the world follow a verse wherein it is said that other men do whatever a great man doeth. However, if we omit these three verses the continuity of thought is in no way disturbed. The other interpolation consists of vv. 30-32. Here these three verses are clearly irrelevant. In v. 29 the dominant role of nature (*prakṛti*) is being described with reference to an ignorant man and the same role is described in v. 33 with reference to a man of knowledge. But in v. 30 Kṛṣṇa suddenly advises Arjuna to engage in battle having surrendered all actions to him and praises those who follow his teachings and condemns the others in the following two verses. These three verses are therefore undoubtedly interpolated.

The fourth chapter which deals with the yoga of wisdom explains how to attain harmony between knowledge and action. In order to explain this properly the distinction between action, inaction and wrong action has to be clarified. This chapter thus properly begins with v. 16 in which Kṛṣṇa proceeds to explain the difference between action and inaction. The first fifteen verses of this chapter have nothing to do with the subject-matter of this chapter and have been prefixed to it only to establish the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. They are indubitably interpolated.

The fifth chapter is almost free from interpolation. It was probably found difficult to interpolate a verse in the middle of the text and so a verse affirming the divinity of Kṛṣṇa has been put at the very end of this chapter (v. 29). Since the way to liberation has already been explained in the preceding verse, this verse which emphasizes the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's divinity as the way for attaining Peace is clearly interpolated.

The sixth chapter has three distinct interpolations. The first interpolation consists of vv. 13-15. Verse 12 explains how one should practise yoga. The following three verses say the same thing with emphasis on the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. They cannot therefore but be interpolated. The second interpolation in this chapter consists of vv. 30 and 31. Verse 29 defines a yogin as one who sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self and this thought is continued in v. 32. Verses 30 and 31, however, speak of the yogin as one who sees Kṛṣṇa everywhere and worships him. These verses are therefore clearly out of context. The last verse of this chapter, viz v. 47, is again interpolated. Verse 46 was undoubtedly the last verse of this chapter at one time because Kṛṣṇa here sums up

his arguments why Arjuna should become a yogin. There is, therefore, no relevance of v. 47 which lays emphasis on faith in Kṛṣṇa.

We now come to the thirteenth chapter. This chapter was undoubtedly at one time the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* before the present chap. VII to XII were put as a wedge between it and the sixth chapter. This chapter has only three interpolated verses. The first of these is v. 3. Since the Knower of the Field has already been defined in the previous verse, his identification with Kṛṣṇa in v. 3 is the thought of a later writer who wanted Kṛṣṇa to be regarded as the omnipresent God. The second interpolated verse is v. 11. Kṛṣṇa has recounted the various qualities which constitute wisdom in vv. 8-10 and someone who thought that devotion to Kṛṣṇa should also be included among these qualities has deliberately interpolated this verse here. The last interpolated verse is v. 19 which is clearly redundant and has been inserted here only to emphasize the importance of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

The fourteenth chapter has three interpolations. The first interpolation is found in the very beginning of this chapter and consists of vv. 2-4. This chapter is devoted to the elucidation of the three qualities known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The first verse of this chapter is of course introductory which should naturally have been followed by verses dealing with the subject-matter of the chapter. The subject matter, however, begins with v. 5. The intervening verses have been interpolated only with the object of showing that Kṛṣṇa is greater even than the Brahma of the *Upaniṣads*, which is here described only as a great womb in which Kṛṣṇa produces all beings. These words could scarcely have been uttered by Kṛṣṇa of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* fame. The second interpolation in this chapter consists of v. 19. Verse 18 describes the fate of those three types of persons who possess either the quality of *sattva*, or of *rajas*, or of *tamas*. The natural corollary to this is the fate of those who have crossed over these three qualities and that is described in v. 20. Verse 19 which lays emphasis on Kṛṣṇa's divinity is thus clearly an interpolation. After Kṛṣṇa has described the fate of those who have crossed over the three qualities, Arjuna naturally wants to know the marks of one who has crossed over the three qualities. These are recounted by Kṛṣṇa in vv. 22-25 which conclude with the words — « he is said to have crossed over the qualities ». Someone, however, who wanted to include devotion to Kṛṣṇa also among the marks of a person who has crossed over the three qualities has appended vv. 26 and 27 after what clearly was at one time the last verse of this chapter.

The fifteenth chapter was certainly originally a very short chapter intended to explain the difference between the soul that suffers constant changes (i.e., the unemancipated soul), the soul that attains the highest goal (i.e., the emancipated soul), and the Supreme Soul, i.e., God. In v. 5, the highest goal (*avyaya pada*) is said to be earmarked for those who have acquired certain spiritual qualities. In v. 16 those who have attained the highest goal (called *kūṭa* here) are called *akṣara* and are distinguished from those who suffer changes and are for that reason called *kṣara*. The two are again distinguished from the Highest Self or Paramātmā in v. 17. It is thus clear that the intervening vv. 6-15 are interpolated. Again, after the distinction of Paramātmā from the other two kinds of

souls was made in v. 17 no further elucidation was necessary. But the person who wanted to establish the divine nature of Kṛṣṇa added two more verses (18 and 19) in which Kṛṣṇa claims that he himself is the Highest Self mentioned in v. 17.

The sixteenth chapter has only one interpolation consisting of vv. 17-20. These four verses add nothing new to the subject matter of this chapter and are meant only to emphasize the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, v. 21, which describes desire, wrath and greed as the triple gate of hell, clearly seems to have been originally in continuation of v. 16 which says that demoniacal men fall into hell through addiction to the gratification of desire.

The seventeenth chapter has also only one short interpolation consisting of vv. 5 and 6. These verses are clearly out of context. Kṛṣṇa is in this chapter describing to Arjuna the three types of worship, the three types of food, the three types of sacrifice, the three types of austerities and the three types of gifts. Now v. 4 describes the three types of worship while from v. 7 onwards the three types of other things are described. The three types of austerities (each consisting of three varieties) are described in vv. 14-19. Verses 5-6 which anticipate the *rājasa* and *tāmasa* austerities described in vv. 18 and 19, are thus clearly interpolated.

The eighteenth and the last chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* has two major interpolations and one minor one at the end. In none of the chapters is the contradiction between the genuine and interpolated verses so glaring as in chap. XVIII. The first interpolation consists of vv. 54-58. In v. 53 Kṛṣṇa says that a person who becomes selfless and composed, having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath and covetousness, becomes one with Brahma. This is, no doubt, the highest goal that one can attain. But in v. 54 and the following four verses Kṛṣṇa has been made to say that a person having become one with Brahma obtains supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and thus having known Kṛṣṇa again enters the Supreme. Surely one who has become one with Brahma cannot again undergo the same process. Moreover in v. 53 Kṛṣṇa talks of casting aside egoism and in v. 58 the same thing is repeated so that v. 59 which was originally in continuation of v. 53 may appear to be in continuation of v. 58. The second major interpolation of this chapter consists of vv. 64-71. These verses are so inconsistent with the preceding verses that it is really amazing that the contradiction has so far escaped the notice of scholars. In vv. 61-62 Kṛṣṇa has in the clearest words advised Arjuna to flee unto God for shelter with all his being and has assured him that by His grace he would obtain supreme peace and everlasting dwelling-place. God in these verses has been mentioned in the third person and there is not the slightest indication that Kṛṣṇa is identical with Him. Moreover Kṛṣṇa concludes his discourse in v. 63 by saying — « Thus has wisdom, more secret than secrecy itself, been declared unto thee by me; having reflected on it fully act thou as thou likest ». But in v. 64 he again draws Arjuna's attention to his supreme word. This time he does not ask him to flee to God but using the first person he exhorts him as follows in vv. 65 and 66 — « Merge thy mind in me, be my devotee, sacrifice to me, prostrate thyself before me, thou shalt come unto me, I pledge thee my truth; thou art dear to me. Aban-

doing all duties come unto me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins ». These two sets of verses (61-63 and 64-66) are so contradictory to and inconsistent with each other that no comment is called for. Verse 65 is, moreover, a repetition of v. 34 of chap. IX and this is proof of the fact that one and the same person is responsible for all the interpolations in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The following verses up to v. 71 are in the manner of a *phalaśruti* of the *Bhagavadgītā* and cannot but be interpolated. The remaining verses of the chapter, barring only one, are genuine. The one which does not appear to be genuine is v. 77 which has again been interpolated to give the impression that Sañjaya was familiar not merely with the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna but also with the universal form of Kṛṣṇa described in chap. XI.